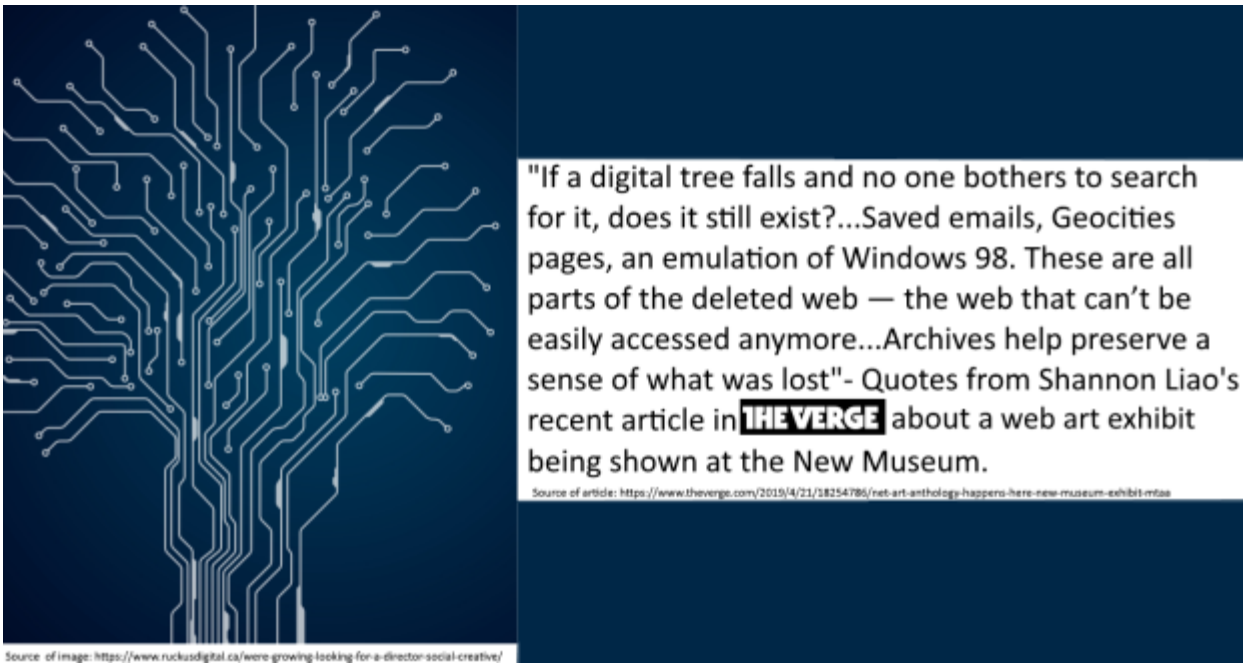
Challenges of archival digitization, Robert Caro, and digital archives


"If a digital tree falls and no one bothers to search for it, does it still exist?...Saved emails, Geocities pages, an emulation of Windows 98. These are all parts of the deleted web — the web that can't be easily accessed anymore...Archives help preserve a sense of what was lost"- Quotes from Shannon Liao's recent article in THE VERGE about a web art exhibit being shown at the New Museum.
Source of article: https://www.theverge.com/2019/4/21/18254786/net-art-anthology-happens-here-new-museum-exhibit-mtaa
Source of image: https://www.ruckusdigital.ca/were-growing-looking-for-a-director-social-creative/

Recently, when going through LinkedIn, I came upon a post by Margot Note, who wears many hats simultaneously as a records manager, archivist, author, and consultant, about the shifting concepts of preservation in the digital world, which had been written last fall. She argues that information professionals, like archivists, have questioned existing assumptions about preservation, with the creation of new principles to born-digital materials (like tweets, Instagram and Facebook posts) and those materials which are digitized. This change is happening while physical records deemed to have "enduring value" are still acquired, stored, and made accessible. She goes on to state that the ever-changing digital landscape has added complexities to archival practice, altering existing procedures, especially in the realm of preservation, since those methods used to preserve physical paper materials no longer translate to digital resources, requiring new methods. For example, she notes that you can't reverse preservation treatments for digital records, unlike with paper records, such as migrating digital files to new formats when old ones are not usable anymore. These are transformations that, hopefully, do not constrain the original functionality of records.

She also adds that for digital materials, the content is what important, not the carrier for such content and that unlike physical paper materials, which may not deteriorate rapidly if they are ignored, digital files are stored on media that "deteriorates, and rely on hardware and software that may no longer be available" which means that neglect is not an option. This means that despite differences in preserving digital and paper materials (often called "analog" or "legacy" materials), some practices can apply to both, like appraisal and addressing information as a collection rather than on an individual level, while recognizing that all materials have "the tendency to decay." She ends by saying that digital and paper preservation considers needs of patrons, with action needed, ultimately, to preserve materials in the immediate future, "ensure the survival of research materials for our users," and ultimately sustain "cultural heritage for the next generation."

While this is a good start, there is a lot more to talk about. I could bring in some of her other publications, like a book on family archives,[1] but I'd like to broaden the scope. This article will talk about the challenge of digitization in archives (with connection to Robert Caro's recent comments) and challenges of digital archives. There will also be a connection to sister institutions of archives, libraries, which are distinct in and of themselves,[2] as I have noted on this blog in the past, even as you get a MLIS/MLS (Master of Library and Information Science or the rapidly dwindling Master of Library Science) to study…archives. As the SAA notes on their "So You Want to Be an Archivist" page, the "number and content of archival education offerings, especially multi-course programs, has continued to expand in recent years, and a few institutions now offer master's degrees in archival studies." I've recently wondered why degrees like archival science (or perhaps archival studies) are not more widely offered, but that is a discussion which can branch out from this post.

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[1] She has written so much that I recommended that she could even write a few e-books. She has actually written a number of books already, like *Creating Family Archives: How to Preserve Your Papers and Photographs*, a paperback book, and two other books more specifically for information professionals: *Project Management for Information Professionals* (seems like a textbook, although she calls it a "handbook") and *Managing Image Collections: A Practical Guide (Chandos Information Professional Series)* (a guide for those at institutional archives, perhaps?).

[2] If you want to know more about the distinction between the two, there is a new book published by the SAA (Society of American Archivists), titled *Archives in Libraries: What Librarians and Archivists Need to Know to Work Together*, which seems to make these distinctions and could be a good read. I can't give a firmer assessment as I have not read the book.

Robert Caro's faulty argument and archival digitization

Digital Imaging Technician Norris White uses a digital reproduction camera system that digitizes flat and bound materials up to 24" x 36". Location: Photographic Imaging Lab, National Archives, College Park, MD.

From the NARA Strategic Plan (2014-2018).

In order to begin this discussion, I am reminded of some dialogue in the 1971 science fiction movie, *The Andromeda Strain*. One character, Mr. Mark Hall (played by James Olson) asks "where is the library?" to which his colleague, Dr. Charles Dutton (played by David Wayne) responds: "No need for books. Everything's in the computer." And the movie goes on, as there is no more discussion. Later, the computer does have an error and overload when too much information is inputted by the scientists, the "heroes" of this film in this top-secret facility in the Nevada desert called "Wildfire." The fact that everything is stored on the computer is not mentioned in any reviews of the movie I have found, and as such, people should revisit this movie for just this reason, as it is still relatively enjoyable. We have gotten to the point that everything is "in the computer" like in this film, not only with libraries and other public institutions, but increasingly with archival institutions in recent days.

That brings us to the recent debate of what Robert Caro, a presidential scholar of the Johnson Administration said about digitization, who was criticized by fellow archivists on the Twittersphere (and likely elsewhere), of archival records. He tried to describe how people are differently interacting with the records now than they had in the past, in the "pre-internet" days,

those before the internet was publicly available, the days in which it was available only to universities and the government which Joe McMillian tried to exploit in a few episodes (starting with the Yerba Buena episode) of the third season of the short-lived series, *Halt and Catch Fire*, but not having much success as the show is all about failure.

Caro's words come from a recent interview by Eleanor Hildebrandt of *Popular Mechanics* because of the publication of his new book, *Working*, about his research process, apparently a #1 best-seller on Amazon. He told the interviewer that he still does much of his writing on a typewriter although he has a laptop on his desk (apparently a Lenovo ThinkPad). This is because he was told by those at the Johnson Presidential Library that his "typewriter was so noisy, it was disturbing the other researchers" which is telling. He also tells the interviewer that he took notes on his computer but still uses his typewriter and writes in longhand (who does that anymore?). While some would argue that this is fine, what he stated next is what was criticized by archivists on Twitter:

> It [writing on a typewriter] makes me think more. Today everybody believes fast is good. Sometimes slow is good. Almost two years ago, Ina [Caro's wife] and I went down [to the archives], and I'm sitting there, in the reading room, writing my notes. Everybody else is standing there taking photographs of their documents. They do it with cell phones now. If you saw me there, you'd see one person who's not in the modern age.

Now, while each researcher can choose their own way to use documents, it seems like he is glaring down on those who use their phones, or other electronic devices, to take pictures of documents. How can you even argue that those individuals are not taking their own notes or that they can think the same amount when using digital devices? As Jan Murphy, a family historian who is a big fan of encouraging people to take notes, added on Twitter, it wouldn't be right to "insist on all handwritten notes all the time," the latter of which is "just nuts." Adding to this is the fact that digital photos can be transcribed at home, even comparing information from different archives. Additionally, sometimes people like Caro, who could be considered to be part of the traditionalist/silent generation since he was born in 1935, may not even be able to read their own handwriting! This is the case with other people, especially those who have dysgraphia, with the extent this learning disability affects the general population not currently known. With this, we should also consider that not everyone has the leisure/ability to transcribe material needed from an archive in longhand. Some, as Murphy noted in another tweet, would rather

"spend the time in the archive, having taken my photo, making notes about the record's condition & taking notes for my source citation etc." The question is simple, as Murphy, who sometimes wishes she had a small manual typewriter when electricity is off, asks, posing a question which Caro never really answers: "But what's wrong with taking digital photos of records in archives?" I could concur with that. I don't see anything wrong with it. In fact, I would argue that institutions like the Maryland State Archives are examples of institutions which allow electronic devices such as phones to take photos of documents.

After this, he goes into the use of paper records:

> I feel **there's something very important**, **to be able to turn the pages yourself**. I don't want anything standing in between me and the paper. People compliment me on finding out how [Johnson] rose to power so fast in Congress by using money. That happened down there, and it was a vague, amorphous thing. I was sitting there with all these boxes, taking all these notes. And you saw letters, his very subservient letters—"Can I have five minutes of your time?"—and then you see the same letters coming back to him. And I said, Something happened here. What's the explanation? Why is a committee chairman writing to Lyndon Johnson, asking for a few minutes of *his* time? So I sat there and put my notes into chronological order. And then it became absolutely clear. Would the same thing have happened if I'd stood there taking photographs and went back? **Possibly. But I don't believe it**. To me, being in the papers is **really important.**

While I understand what he is saying here, more and more records are online than ever before, meaning that the records of the Obama Administration and future presidencies will undoubtedly be different from those of the Johnson Administration. Caro is almost stuck back in time, part of the old guard of presidential scholars who inhabited presidential libraries (which can more accurately be called presidential archives). I won't touch on the plans for the Obama Library only because I have written on that topic for one of my classes at UMD and it may be published in an academic journal in the future (fingers crossed), so I don't want to tread on the same topics in this post. I would add that using paper records is not the only way to interact with records, as users can easily interact with them online using new and exciting methods.

From here, Caro becomes a bit ridiculous:

> Well, there's no reason why that [a deep dive through thousands of digital pages of emails] *has* to be a different kind of research. Someone else could come along who was

> nuts like me and say, I'm going to look at every email. What's more worrisome to me is that, when you talk about digitization, somebody has to *decide* what's digitized. I don't want anyone deciding what I can see. It's very hard to destroy a complete paper trail of something. Lyndon Johnson was very secretive, and he wanted a lot of stuff destroyed. But the fact is, they were cross-referencing these pages into ten or twenty or thirty different files. There's always something. But the whole idea of emails—I don't use emails, I may be wrong—I'm not sure there's a trail like that. It's too easy to delete.

While he makes a good point that there can be the same kind of research, that doesn't mean he is right overall. It is laughable for him to claim that "when you talk about digitization, somebody has to *decide* what's digitized" and to then declare "I don't want anyone deciding what I can see." Clearly, he does not, understand the fundamental archival principle of appraisal, which has been debated from the time of those like British archivist Hilary Jenkinson in 1922 and U.S. archivist T.R. Schellenberg in 1956, the selection and description within archives. The records he is looking at, while researching at the Johnson Library, are chosen by professional archivists, specifically those from NARA, so people are deciding what he can see. As such, deciding what records are digitized is also a responsibility of archivists, which will be explained later in this post.

He further claims that it is "very hard to destroy a complete paper trail of something." I'm not actually completely sure about that. Taking from NARA's official history of presidential libraries, they write that before these libraries came about, with impetus from FDR in 1939 when he donated his personal papers to the federal government, presidential papers were often dispersed by former presidents and their heirs after their time in office. They further note that while many collections of records exist of presidents before Hoover at the Library of Congress, others are divided between historical societies, libraries, and private collectors. Even worse, as they acknowledge, "many materials have been lost or deliberately destroyed." So, a "complete paper trail," as he described it, CAN be destroyed.

Considering that "Lyndon Johnson was very secretive, and he wanted a lot of stuff destroyed" as he notes, this contradicts his point that it is "very hard to destroy a complete paper trail of something." I mention this because it would mean that if Johnson wanted, he could have worked to destroy a complete paper trail, especially since it was after Watergate that presidential records were considered property of the federal government rather than "private property" of the

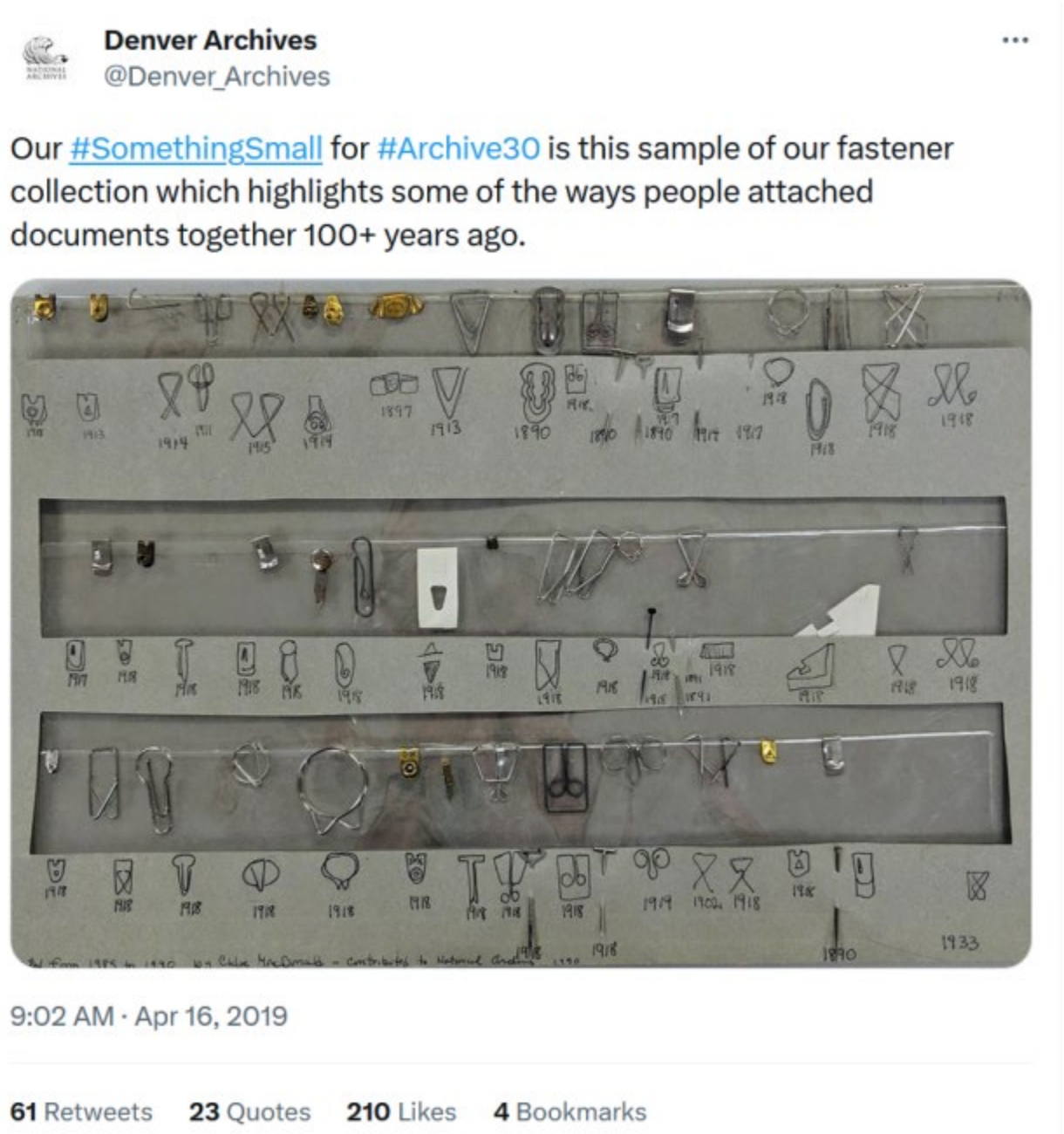
former Presidents, a view also widely held in the archival profession at the time. Furthermore, when he talks about cross-referencing of the pages, he seems to not understand how emails work. This is no surprise from someone who doesn't "use emails," as he admits! He claims that he is not "sure there's a trail like that" and that "it's too easy to delete" emails. While it is true is easy to "delete" them, think about "deleted" files on a computer. They are not really deleted but rather the directory to them is eliminated. The same is also true of any file, whether a PDF, a photograph, or something else you upload online: the file is never truly deleted, but only the directory to it is deleted. Just like when you throw something away in a garbage can, it is not simply eliminated, but it is sent somewhere else, like a horrid waste-to-energy plant or an overflowing landfill. There was actually a whole *Futurama* episode about an overly wasteful society back in May 1999, titled "A Big Piece of Garbage."

As Curl Hopkins wrote in *The Daily Dot* six years ago, when a user "deletes" an email normally it becomes "invisible to that user and is immediately a candidate to be overwritten" but until then it exists and it may even "persist longer on company servers." He further notes that even if a computer is "taken off your computer, it may still be available on the host's server," adding that you must "presume that any email you compose will be available remain accessible forever," although secure email services are available. There may still be "elements that indicate the prior presence of the email" and logins that are often retained, to say the least. Even one article recommending how to delete emails forever warns that "some online email services maintain an offline backup of email accounts," adding that "your permanently deleted email may still reside in these inaccessible backups…There is **no way** to force immediate deletion of emails in these backups." Also, there are specific data retention rules on the federal level and within various organizations, which require retention of such emails. I am also reminded here of "Testimony" (S4, ep9) of *Veep*. I mention this because, at one point during the episode, Mike McLintock (played by Matt Walsh), the incompetent press secretary, is brought before a congressional committee. He thinks he deleted the voice memos of then-president, Selina Meyer (played by Julia Louis-Dreyfus). In fact, as the committee reminds him, these memos exist in the cloud, and they plan to listen to them for any further evidence in their investigation![3]

[3] Interestingly, in the review of this episode by Kate Kulzick of A.V. Club, this part of the episode is not mentioned. In fact, Mike's role in the episode is not mentioned at all!

With that, it leads to the next part of this post, which goes to a question that the public, taken in by stereotypes about archivists, often asks of archivists and archival institutions.

Why can't everything be digitized?


Denver Archives
@Denver_Archives
Our #SomethingSmall for #Archive30 is this sample of our fastener collection which highlights some of the ways people attached documents together 100+ years ago.
9:02 AM · Apr 16, 2019
61 Retweets 23 Quotes 210 Likes 4 Bookmarks

Screenshot of a tweet from the Denver Archives showing ways people attached documents together 100+ years ago

In May 2017, Samantha Thompson, an archivist at the Peel Art Gallery Museum and Archives, wrote a post which aimed to answer the question of why archivists don't digitize everything since it is a common question. As such, it is clearly important to remind people who not everything is digitized and that, in fact, "only a tiny fraction of the world's primary resources are available digitally," coupled with the fact that archivists and librarians themselves are "behind the abundance of primary sources already available on the internet" while organizations like the Internet Archive, or Ancestry.com have raised "public expectations about access to historical resources."[4] She goes onto argue that digitization, the "production of an electronic image of these record," saves information from a paper record, but it does not produce "a clone of the record" but rather results in an "approximation…of a dimension of the record," often called a surrogate. She further notes that while archivists commonly digitize records in order to increase access (which some cataloguers do as well), they also argue (rightly) that mass digitization is costly in time and money, which sometimes people are skeptical of, not realizing that "large-scale digitization in an institutional setting is not your average home scanning operation." There are a few reasons for this, including archives holding vast amounts of material, with digitizing of even small archival collections as a big-time commitment since many groups of archival records are not easy to scan in quickly.

For instance, while you could use an automatic feeder to quickly scan a stack of pages, the benefits of such speed must be "weighed against the risk of a one-of-a-kind document being mangled by a paper jam" which is always a concern! This means you must engage in manually scanning which includes tasks such as removing staples (and paper clips), positioning the item, processing the images, and entering the appropriate metadata, all of which is a lot of work. As such, "scanning a single archival box of records can take days" as she puts it. This is even more the case if records within the file are various shapes and sizes, or if they are large enough that they must be scanned in sections and "digitally stitched together." While sometimes taking a photograph is the best option, you need a "high-quality photographic set-up including lighting, document holders, and a camera with an appropriate lens" which obviously is expensive enough that not all institutions can afford such a set-up. This means that scanning produces not an exact

[4] If you are interested, I'd also recommend reading "How do archivists organize collections?", "How Do Archivists Describe Collections? (or, How to Read a Finding Aid)", and most importantly "What do archivists do all day?", two of which are also by Samantha Thompson.

copy of the record “but only an impression of certain aspects of it” and it may be hard to convey annotations (like sticky notes) on the paper record itself in a digital form, or physical characteristics of the paper records. This brings us to one of the most important parts: linking the digitized record to crucial information, which is often called metadata, some of which is technical and other parts that describe the record itself. The latter is information like a date or time the record was created. But some elements are more complex like determining the “story of the person or organization that created it.” As she puts it rightly, an individual record “within an archival collection does not tell us its whole story.” This means that without vital descriptive work of paper records in the first place, those electronic records which are produced through digitization would be an unusable and undifferentiated mass.

She goes onto note that since digitization involves investment of resources and time, archivists need to be clear that the electronic files produced adequately represent the originals, meaning there need to be quality control checks in place. This involves factors such as scanning resolutions, typing accuracy and photographic skill, since archivists are responsible for ensuring that “people are getting a reliable and authentic view of records.” There is another conundrum with digitization itself: archivists are required to not only retain the paper originals but the digital files as well. These are files that are subject to disorder and decay just like paper records, with a tiny shift causing a set of errors, with even unused data subject to random degradation and loss, often called “bit rot.” Coupled with this is the question of future readability of the data since digitization of files is not worthwhile if no one can open the files as software and the accompanying “hardware inevitably becomes obsolete.” Luckily for all of us, especially those in the archival field, archivists are at the forefront of pushing boundaries of digital longevity as technologies and file format standards are improving. However, as she notes, the “average lifespan of a hard or flash drive is still a fraction of that of a piece of paper stored in optimal conditions” with digital data needing to be stored in specific temperature conditions as well. All of this means that when anything is digitized, archivists commit to maintaining the digital file and the original on which that file is based.

This connects to the resources required for digitization and post-digitization duties. For one, cameras and scanners which are high-resolution which can accurately capture the data are expensive, with the same being the case for software to process images and attain digital storage which is secure. For digitization to “make a dent” in an average archival collection, a scanner, or

several scanners, need to be constantly working, with some large archivists maintaining specific digitization units while smaller institutions fit it in when and where they can among their other duties. As a result, digitization of specific records is often part of projects which are funded by partnerships or grants, as she notes. In terms of the post-digitization duties, it is needed to make sure that the records are responsibly shared on the web, after checking with donor(s) to make sure the records can be freely shared in the first place with some not wanting this to happen for various reasons or due to copyright restrictions. Such sharing is important as it allows archivists to make the full meaning of records available to those accessing them online.

As such, digitization itself, as she argues, is a process that is approached by archivists methodically. This requires, of course, assessing archival collections beforehand to determine whether the records are worth being shared and digitized. Such a process takes time, even if an "inexpensive pool" of labor can be mobilized, along with a big investment of resources and time. As a result, as she puts it, we may never, in fact, have everything digitized, with trials and triumphs of digitization being a "constantly unfolding process" while new models are coming about. With that, access is still important, as is digitization, with archivists continuing to "grapple with this immensely powerful way to broadcast the knowledge we steward." Her article ends by stating that everyone can help support digitization through sharing information that goes with a photograph from an institutional collection, and to, most important of all: "be curious about what archivists, information professionals, and cultural workers do." The latter requires, of course, asking questions and spreading answers, since the more people who understand the value of archivists, the more support they will get, and the more support archivists can provide to the public at-large.

It is worth recalling here a paper I wrote last semester (which will likely never be published anywhere academically) where I asked different archival institutions about their approach to digitization, using different forms of interaction, like Twitter, email, web-form submissions, and web-chat (AskUsNow!), the latter which is relatively horrible/annoying from my experience, although others may have had different experiences.[5] One of the best responses I

[5] Perhaps at a later time I'll bring in my other papers I have currently uploaded to Internet Archive like "The concept of a Baltimorean Homeless Library (BHL)," "Uggles and the University of Illinois: a very furry situation indeed!," and "Strategic Plan Analysis--Maryland State Library Resource Center (SLRC)," the latter of which is relatively technical. All of these are mainly in the realm of libraries rather than archives, however.

got was from Corey Lewis of the Maryland State Archives (MSA) who told me that I could personally contact him if I was interested in their digitization efforts. It was a response of high quality I wouldn't have gotten if I had just looked on their website. To this day, they still don't have their digitization strategy on their website from what I can tell (perhaps its hidden somewhere). I also got responses back from the Council of State Archives (CoSA) on digitization and even from the Oregon State Archives, the latter of which I hadn't even tweeted to, which was impressive. In a similar manner to the person from the MSA, I got a message from Joanne Archer, the head of Access and Outreach Services at Special Collections and University Archives at the University of Maryland Libraries, which said I could send her any further questions. Interestingly, when it comes to digitization they do not "directly solicit campus input." With that, we can move into the final part of this post which focuses on challenges of digital archives and the digital world.

Challenges of digital archives and the current digital landscape

In the "Mars University" episode of Futurama, which first aired on October 3rd, 1999, the Planet Express crew go to Mars, which has, in the universe of this wondrous animated sitcom, been terraformed and has a typical college campus called Mars University. Before the episode becomes an homage/parody to *Animal House*, there is a scene where Professor Farnsworth tells Leela, Fry, and Bender about the Wong Library, adding that it has "the largest collection of literature in the Western universe." After that, Fry looks in and sees these two disks:

That's obviously the joke, and is more than a "bookish moment." It's basically saying that all the knowledge can be stored on two disks. It's still kind of funny, although the joke is dated, as these are supposed to be something like CDs (which first came about in 1982). In a future post I'll definitely bring in the *Futurama* episode ("Lethal Inspection") that fellow archivist Samantha Cross of *POP Archives* reviewed, when I get to that season, as I'm currently only on Season 2 of the show as I plan to re-watch all the show's episodes, over time.

This brings us to digital archives, specifically, which goes beyond the digitization of paper files. This applies to files which are born-digital. It requires, of course, a digital preservation policy as Margot Note, who was cited at the beginning of this article, writes about, which would need to be integrated into the program of an archives itself. It would also necessitate collaboration with other institutions and individuals in preserving digital records, and making sure that digital preservation is specifically tailored to your institution. Beyond this, there are two elements that apply to digital archives: choosing what will be preserved and file formats that are sustainable. For the first element, I turn to an article, again, by Margot Note. She writes that selection and appraisal of digital records is similar to physical records, but that long-term preservation of digital records relies on "understanding of how file formats work." It also requires, as she notes, access to the appropriate hardware and software, with the appropriate skills, with the unavailability of these factors in an archival institution meaning that preservation of the digital

files will not be successful. As such, technical appraisal of the digital files themselves considers whether they can be read, then subsequently documented, processed and finally preserved. Helping choose what digital archives preserve depends on whether the content itself is relevant to the mission of the archival institution, the historical value of the records, specifically if they have enduring value or are significant socially or culturally. For the digital records themselves, archivists also need to consider the integrity of the files, if they are usable or reliable. This means answering whether the materials themselves are in "preservation-friendly file formats" and if there are limits on the records, in terms of privacy or intellectual property, which makes them "inaccessible for research." Another crucial factor, as she describes, is funding since the preservation and management of such digital records is by no means cheap. Finally, she notes that one must consider whether the digital records are unique or whether they are fully documented. She adds that keeping everything, when it comes to digital files, is not wise, since there are limited resources and mechanisms to search (and access) collections of a large-scale are often not adequate, and that selection curates collections which will have "high research value." She ends with her point that no matter how complicated the systems for managing digital records become, people need to be involved in choosing what is preserved as digital archival records. Even with the possible automation of some decisions in days to come, archivists would need to balance benefits of saving certain digital records over other digital records, at a time that archivists continue to rise to the challenge of selecting and maintenance of "digital artifacts in a changing technological landscape" as she puts it.

In a related article, she writes about archivists choosing the right and sustainable file formats. This relates to digital archives because the sustainability of digital records in and of themselves depends on file formats that will last for long times, with the Library of Congress putting in place "some criteria for predicting sustainable file formats in digital archives" as she puts it. It further requires considering whether a format is widely used, the files can be identified, specifications of file formats are publicly available and documented, the files can function on a variety of services (be interoperable), and they have an open format since issues with licensing, patents, digital rights, and property rights complicate preservation efforts. She points to efforts by the Digital Preservation Coalition to analyze file formats which are commonly used. She also writes that over time some file formats have become preferred over others, like TIFF files used as master images for preservation during digitization and PDF/A as a standard file format. Even

so, some standards for file formats are still in flux, with no consensus among archivists, as she puts it, as to what "file format or codecs should be used for preservation purposes for digital video"! At the closing of her article, she argues that regardless of the preservation actions you take, having file formats that are sustainable is crucial, since having file formats which are lasting influences the "feasibility of protecting content" in the face of a changing environment in the technological world where repositories and users co-exist at the present.

Speaking of all of this, I am reminded of an ongoing study by S.C. Healy, a PhD candidate in digital humanities at a university based in Ireland (Maynooth University), trying to find how "wider research and cultural heritage communities' can progress from creating web archives to establishing paradigms to use web archives for study and research." I plan to sign up for this study as I've talked about web archiving in several classes. This is relevant since, as Genealogy Jude, as she calls herself on Twitter, noted, "the Internet…has shifted the demographic profile of genealogists." This matters to archives and archivists because many of those genealogists are some of the most common users of libraries.[6] In fact, one of the articles I found during my research for my paper on the Obama Library, a scholar in the 1990s (I don't remember the exact date), National History Day, where I am being a judge again this year on the state and national levels, and connecting with genealogists as a way to bring in more users to archival institutions.

Perhaps we can even bring in one of the SAA words of the week, specifically level of description. Simply it is defined as the "level of arrangement of the unit being described" and the "completeness or exhaustiveness of the description." It connects to recent discussions like one at Hornbake Library recently which focuses on impact of digital repositories, which is in the same

[6] She also stated, in a tweet following, that it is good that genealogy has found new people with "energy and new ideas, otherwise it would be a dying hobby" which I will agree with, as a millennial genealogist myself, beyond what someone like fellow genealogist Amy Johnson Crow will describe. Others who responded to her said that it's a time-consuming hobby, while others said that retired people still have some advantages over young people, and her responding to a concern that the internet has isolated people (not an invalid concern), that "the Internet has enabled people to contact relatives and share research much more easily than before" which also is a valid point! This also includes, as Carolynn, another genealogist, argued: "challenging racist, misogynistic and xenophobic genealogists" even if that can be hard. At the same time, I see those, in the wake of the racist ancestry.com ad (for Ancestry Canada) to grumble about how much they "hate" them, for justified reasons, although I don't necessarily feel the same as a person who runs two genealogy blogs and is a family historian for both my mom and dad's side of the family. I seem to sympathize more with those who say that there are reasons "why you can't rely on search engines like @Ancestry" with misspellings and mistaken listings

realm as digital archives. Perhaps discussions like this will make it easier to define what archivists do and what archives are, as some have tried to do through teaching.

I also think about, apart from creation of some digital archives portals, of what Lilly Carrel, archivist at the Menil Archives in Houston said about digital preservation: "I think digital preservation offers creative ways to enhance the post-custodial approach and ensure important records are preserved" who was recently interviewed by Vince Lee of the SAA's Committee of Public Awareness, also known as COPA. That is even more the case when there are digital archives, whether completely digital or part of traditional archival institutions like those at universities or serving specific states. There is also a job at the Library of Congress about web archiving, with applications that close on May 1.

With all of this, there is, not surprisingly, a debate among scholars, especially in the field of archives and libraries, over a possible difference between a digital library and a digital archives. Some within the field say there is a difference, while others dismiss that, arguing that there is not. Currently, I don't want to go down that road, or talk about some continuing tension between historians and archivists, despite past efforts by the SAA to make connections with the AHA, the American Historians Association. I also could talk more about the challenges when it comes to archiving born-digital material, but perhaps I will revisit that in a future post on here. I'll end with what one archivist, blogging on the *New Archivist* WordPress over five years ago, put it, "please keep up the discussions, and contribute in ways that you think have value," adding that the "seeming lack of support in public" doesn't mean that archivists are not doing anything.[7] That is what I am trying to do with post and this blog, as a whole, changing from a focus on historical explorations about the Maryland Extra Regiment, the Maryland Loyalist Regiment, reprinting past posts and biographies I wrote when I worked at the MSA on the First Maryland Regiment, which is often called the Maryland 400, and other topics, as readers of this blog from the beginning will know. This all connects to my newfangled newsletter on SubStack, which I recommend readers of this blog subscribe to, which I hope expands in the days to come.

Until next time! I look forward to all your comments.

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[7] They also said that the lack of supportive views on Twitter or lists "does not mean that the vast majority of people are not appalled by the few rude ones" but rather that the latter are shown indifference by the many.